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ABSTRACT

In 1996, Kentucky's Southeast Community College (SCC) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the teaching and learning of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. SCC's primary goals include: introducing the project to the college's Institutional Advisory Board and faculty, linking a U.S. History and a Spanish course, securing institutional funding to support the project, acquiring appropriate library resources, holding an essay competition among local eighth grade students, and conducting professional development workshops for SCC faculty. Through e-mail, voice-mail, and presentations, information about the project has been disseminated to faculty, staff, and boards. Library materials have been acquired through private funding. Eighth grade students who participated in the essay competition discussed what it means to be an American, and workshops devoted to the project's themes were held for the ten winners and their families. Issues that the history and the Spanish class share have been identified and partially integrated into the courses, and the process of seeking official permission has been initiated. Remaining tasks for the program include integrating the project's themes into classes at all three of SCC's campuses and obtaining official permission for linking the history and Spanish language courses. Students and faculty at SCC have identified the most divisive aspects of American society as race, religion, and social/economic class. (HAA)

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PROGRESS REPORT
EXPLORING AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES: IN QUEST OF COMMON GROUND

Southeast Community College was established in 1960 as part of the University of Kentucky community college system. With campuses located at Cumberland, Whitesburg, and Middlesboro, Southeast Community College serves the predominantly rural population of Bell, Harlan, and Letcher counties in the coalfields of southeastern Kentucky. During the fall semester of 1996; 2,346 students were enrolled at Southeast Community College, of whom 1,632 were full-time and 714 were part-time. Southeast Community College also served approximately 1,635 people through the non-credit programs.

The primary goals of our college's Action Plan to enhance teaching and learning about American pluralism and identity at Southeast Community College have been:

(1) to introduce the project to the college's Institutional Advisory Board and faculty
(2) to plan and initiate the process of linking HIS 108/109 and SPI 101/102
(3) to secure institutional funding to support the project
(4) to identify and acquire library resources to support the project
(5) for the GE 140 (Development of Leadership) class to plan and conduct an essay competition among eighth grade students in the Bell County school systems devoted to the project themes
(6) to conduct Professional Development Workshops for the Southeast Community College faculty.

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Southeast Community College has been successful in accomplishing the majority of the goals stated in our Action Plan. Via e-mail and voice-mail Peggy Marcum disseminated information about the project to all faculty and staff at the Bell County campus of Southeast Community College and described the project to all Southeast Community College faculty at the monthly faculty meeting. She also introduced the project to the college's Publicity Committee and Director of Public Information, presented the project before the Institutional Advisory Board of Southeast Community College, and described the project before the Communications, Fine Arts, and Humanities division of Southeast Community College. In addition, at the bi-monthly facilitators meetings Joseph Marcum, in his capacity as facilitator for the Arts and Sciences faculty at the Bell County campus, kept the faculty and staff updated as to the activities and progress of the project. The president of Southeast Community College, Dr. W. Bruce Ayers, re-affirmed his support of the project and its goals many times, including providing funding needed to acquire library resources identified by team-members Joseph Marcum and Peggy Marcum. Those resources have been acquired, catalogued, and shelved in the library at the Bell County Campus of Southeast Community College and are therefore available to all fourteen community colleges within the University of Kentucky system via interlibrary loan.

Another successful activity was the Essay Competition among eighth grade students in the Bell County schools. In order to conduct the project the students in Joseph Marcum's Development of Leadership class (GE 140) first familiarized themselves with the project's basic goals by considering and discussing the set of

"Questions for Americans" developed for the NEH's project "A National Conversation On American Pluralism And Identity." They then organized and conducted a semester-long essay competition answering the question - What Does It Mean To Be An American? The competition culminated with a series of student-directed workshops for the ten essay winners and their families devoted to the project's themes and an Awards Ceremony/Banquet to recognize all the participants from the Bell County schools.

Issues and themes that the United States history survey courses and the Spanish classes share have been identified and partially integrated into those classes at the Bell County campus. The process of seeking *official* permission through the University of Kentucky Community College System's office to link HIS 108/109 and SPI 101/102 also has been initiated. In addition, the instructors for those classes are using videos acquired for the project to spark discussions of the project's themes. Especially effective discussion starters have been the videos "Talk To Me: Americans In Conversation," and "Surviving Columbus: The Story of the Pueblo People."

What remains to be done is first, infusion of the project's themes into classes at all three campuses of Southeast Community College. As revealed in the discussions during the site visit by our mentor and at the Professional Development Workshop conducted by Joseph Marcum and Peggy Marcum at the Bell County campus, faculty there are including readings, videos, and discussions related to the project questions into their classes. However, primarily because the campuses at

Cumberland and Whitesburg are respectively 60 and 90 miles distant from Bell County, communication and coordination, essential to the success of the project, have been difficult. Second, as indicated in the above paragraph, yet to be completed is official permission from the University of Kentucky Community College Systems Office to link the United States history survey classes (HIS 108/109) and the Spanish language classes (SPI 101/102). Work continues on this goal of our Action Plan, but it is expected that permission will be granted in the near future.

Students and faculty at Southeast Community College have identified the most divisive aspects of American society as race, religion, and social/economic class. What we have in common was identified as opportunity and the "freedom to do and be what we want to be." Other students and faculty members feel what brings us together as Americans are times of war and tragedies and the goodwill of such holidays as Thanksgiving and Christmas. When asked to suggest metaphors for America, students said that "America is a large, colorful Monet", "part vegetable soup - because the soup is very obvious as to what vegetable it is, but the broth is a blend of all the ingredients," or a "playground" because "so many different children come to the playground." Concern was also expressed about the lack of a shared civic culture, as well as a general sense of confusion about what we do have in common. One student related the story of the soldiers who made a dish called rock stew: "no one wanted to get involved with anyone else but got excited about what was happening and jumped in to help and couldn't wait to taste it."